
Controversies in Breast Cancer Diagnosis and Management

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Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women, and it is the single most common cancer in Hawaii, with 425 new cases diagnosed in 1993. For unknown reasons, the incidence of breast cancer has increased markedly in the past few decades and is expected to continue to do so indefinitely. Clinical research and technology have expanded our knowledge of breast cancer and our treatment options enormously, and few diseases have seen such changes in their primary management or engendered such controversy as breast cancer. Some of the most pressing controversies will be discussed with the view toward defining the current status and outlining strategies for resolution.

Screening for early breast cancer has been solidly established as a cost-effective method of reducing mortality from breast cancer. It is a cornerstone of the primary and preventive care of women. However, a consensus on the optimal screening schedule has not been reached. Further research regarding stratification of women in differing risk groups is needed to resolve these

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issues. Technology for the screening and diagnosis of breast cancer continues to improve; implementation of these new methods into our clinical armamentarium is ongoing.

Breast-preserving therapy for early breast cancer has gained acceptance as the preferred alternative to mastectomy in early breast cancer. However, controversial and difficult issues remain concerning patient evaluation, selection, and technique for breast-preserving treatments.

Few subjects in breast cancer management have engendered more confusion in both the medical and the lay communities than adjuvant systemic treatment. Again, methods for optimal selection of candidates for this therapy is problematic. Hormone therapy has been particularly challenging in breast cancer, treatment and prevention, as well as postmenopausal replacement use. Hormone therapy is now the subject of a major research initiative from the National Institutes of Health.

Thus, it is clear that breast cancer is a common and yet heterogeneous and complex disease for which there is a wide array of treatment modalities and options. Not surprisingly, it is the integration of treatment through coordination of multiple specialties that has moved to the forefront of breast cancer care. The multidisciplinary treatment approach will become our best effective strategy for dealing with this illness, and we should look to more coordinated care plans and centers to serve our breast cancer patients in the future.

Domestic Violence—Identifying Abuse

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Domestic violence is a widespread community health problem as well as a serious crime. One out of every 4 women seen in emergency departments is a battered woman, making domestic assault the most common cause of injury to women. Fifty percent of all women will be physically abused at some point in their lives by men with whom they live. More than 4,000 women are murdered by their partners each year, usually after they have just left the abusive relationship. Partner abuse also is seen in lesbian and gay relationships.

Domestic violence is defined as a pattern of coercive, controlling behavior that one person exercises over another, and which may involve physical, sexual, emotional, economic or psychological abuse, perpetrated with little or no regard for that

individual's rights or feelings. Although often associated with domestic violence, the abuse is not brought on by mental illness, alcohol or drugs, stress or anger or loss of control. The only common denominator found in looking at characteristics of the victims is that they almost all are female. Many misconceptions about traits of victims are the results of battering, not the cause of it.

In order to be effective, all physicians must recognize the spectrum of presentations of the victims to the medical setting. Overt abuse and physical injuries are obvious if on exposed parts of the body; more subtle symptoms include stress, medical illnesses, psychological problems including drug and alcohol dependency and finally, suicide. Battering during pregnancy is